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215. The Dutch-speaking Caribbean

Die niederländischsprachige Karibik

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1. Introduction

Dutch, the sole official language of “the Dutch-speaking Caribbean”, has a *de facto* minority status in the pertinent territories. In the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, its native use is largely restricted to expatriate Dutch-speakers, the majority languages being Papiamentu (Pp) in the leeward ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao) and English or English-lexifier Creole (EC) in the windward SSS group (Sint Maarten, Saba, Sint Eustatius). In Suriname, where a more substantial native Dutch-speaking population exists, a distinct Surinamese Dutch variety has emerged. It coexists with the various Creole languages which arose in Suriname, Surinamese varieties of Hindi and Javanese, Kejia, and several endangered indigenous Cariban and Arawakan languages. Despite their multilingual character, Dutch is still the only official language and the language of education in Suriname and Aruba. In Curaçao and Bonaire, Pp is the language of instruction in most Kindergartens and primary schools since August 2004, whereas English has been used in education in the SSS islands since 1983. 25 years of independence has not brought about an independent language policy in Suriname, where any discussion on language matters is made difficult by the ethnic status of the different languages.

Emigration from Suriname to the Netherlands, which peaked around independence in 1975, and slowed when Suriname entered a period of military rule (1980–1987), has resulted in a substantial minority group of roughly 250,000 Surinamese in the Netherlands. Migration from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba to the Netherlands accelerated in the late 1980s and 1990s, resulting in an estimated Antillean/Aruban population there of appr. 70,000, and predictions are that this trend will continue into the 21st century. Some of the linguistic complexity of the so-called Dutch-speaking Caribbean has, in this way, been transplanted to the Netherlands.

2. The sociolinguistic situation in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba

2.1. The languages of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba

The ABC islands are located near to the Latin-American mainland, off the coast of Venezuela. The smaller windward islands are located 900 km to the north-east in the Eastern Caribbean. Clearly, the six islands do not constitute a geographic unit. Nor were they ever linguistically or culturally uniform, despite their having been under a single administration since 1845. The 2001 census identifies the languages used in the islands’ households as in Table 215.1. Majority languages have been shaded. Apparently, no attempt was made by the census takers to distinguish between standard varieties of English and English-lexifier Creole.

Tab. 215.1: Home languages (in percentages of households)

	Papiamentu	Spanish	Dutch	English
Saba	0.5	4.4	2.0	89.0
Sint Eustatius	1.6	5.5	4.3	84.1
Sint Maarten	2.3	14.8	4.2	64.3
Bonaire	72.3	11.4	10.4	4.0
Curaçao	83.0	4.6	9.3	3.5
Aruba	69.4	13.2	6.1	8.1

Pp, a Spanish/Portuguese-lexifier Creole language, is spoken by most of the population of appr. 200,000 in the ABC islands, irrespective of racial appearance and socio-economic position. The opening of oil refineries in Curaçao and Aruba attracted expatriate labour to these islands in the 1920s–30s. Segregated employment- and housing policies resulted in enclave communities where EC varieties, Spanish, Anglo-American, and (Surinamese) Dutch were spoken. The recently booming hospitality industry has again attracted immigrant labour from Caribbean territories as well as from mainland South America, with Spanish varieties, Haitian, and EC varieties making (renewed) appearances.

The population of appr. 75,000 in the SSS islands consists predominantly of speakers of English/EC. To date, no attempt has been made to describe the varieties spoken in these islands, and their status as English or English Creole remains uncertain.

As seen in Table 215.1, the main languages spoken in the Netherlands Antilles are all well-represented in Sint Maarten, attesting to the degree to which its population has grown and continues to swell through immigration. In Saba and Sint Eustatius, immigration has been much less significant, overall. Due to the migration of Arubans and Curaçaoans to Sint Maarten, the influence of Pp has grown there, to the point where it has become a second language of common currency. Despite the absence of physical or other boundaries between the Dutch and French parts of the island, French does not constitute a significant presence in Dutch Sint Maarten; in fact, English/EC is considered to be the vernacular of French St. Martin, too.

2.2. Language and Education in the ABC Islands

The situation in the islands' schools is well-documented for Curaçao only. Reports on

the state of education in the island throughout the 19th century lament the poor results achieved by students, already identifying the gap between Pp, the home language of all social classes, and Dutch, the school language, as being at the root of the problems (cf. van Putte 1997). Despite punitive measures aimed at discouraging the use of Pp in the schools, it was never completely absent from the school grounds. Nor was the issue which should be the language of instruction in the islands' school easily resolved; various attempts to change the educational system have floundered on the question whether a new educational system should maintain Dutch as the official language of instruction (Prins 1975; Smeulders 1987; Prins-Winkel 1983; UNESCO 1976). Despite growing support for Pp and bilingual education, until recently, no steps were taken to achieve the introduction of Pp as language of instruction. More recently, a proposal for changes in the educational system was launched in the mid 1990s, but again, no agreement was reached on those aspects which concerned the language(s) of instruction. Marta Dijkhoff was Minister of Education in the government of the Netherlands Antilles during 1990–1994, and had ministerial responsibility for the preparation of the policy referred to here. The dispute became a legal issue when the Catholic schoolboard's request to be permitted to implement a different system of bilingual education than that proposed by the government, was rejected for public funding. The courts ruled in favour of the schoolboard, accepting the argument that freedom of language choice parallels freedom of religion (Dijkhoff 1998). With the educational partners still divided on the language issue, the educational policy was implemented in 2003. Most schools chose Pp as their language of instruction. At present, it is too early to evaluate the results.

In Aruba, too, the government and schoolboards appear to be in favour of bilingual education. Yet, as in Curaçao, Dutch instructional material is used in the schools, while Pp functions as the language of oral instruction. However, plans are afoot to give Pp official status in primary education (Rutgers 1997). The first all-Pp school, the *Kolegio Erasmo* (Erasmus College) in Curaçao, which has offered primary education in Pp since 1987, is currently expanding its primary school offerings to include secondary-level education in Pp.

2.3. The current position and prospects of Papiamentu

Pp has coexisted with Dutch and Spanish throughout its existence. In modern times, students returning from the Netherlands after the pursuit of higher education there, are an important vehicle of Dutch influence, while Spanish enters homes daily through popular Venezuelan television and radio channels. Tourism brings a large part of the population in contact with native speakers of Anglo-American. In this long-standing situation of language contact and multilingualism, it is not surprising that for want of the pressure of a standardised variety, lexical variation as well as variation in the grammar of Pp has been noted (Muller 1982; Wood 1970; Andersen 1974; 1983). Some of this variation, however, points to an emerging distinction between formal and informal registers, testifying to the strength of Pp as an accepted language of communication in a wide range of social settings.

The importance of Pp as the vehicle for national sentiments grew in the post-Second World War period, as evidenced for instance by a 1958 ordinance which allowed for the use of both Dutch and Pp in the Council of the Netherlands Antilles. In the 1969 social disturbances in Curaçao, the use of Pp distinguished between those who were for and those who were against the just cause of the workers' protests. Although proficiency in Dutch is still seen as providing access to advanced study and better job opportunities, Dutch is barred from social manifestations that may be termed 'local' or 'national', and in the arts, the non-print media and local politics, its role is negligible. There is, on the other hand, still an important Dutch literary production.

With increasing written use of Pp in the post-Second World War period, the need for

an official orthography was widely felt. Unfortunately, political discussions on the future of the Antillean constellation coincided with discussions on the orthography of Pp. The political exit of Aruba from the Netherlands Antilles in 1986, when it acquired separate status within the Netherlands kingdom, was accompanied by a highly emotional discussion on orthography, condemning negotiations on this issue to failure. In the end, Aruba adopted a different spelling from Curaçao and Bonaire. After the separation of Aruba from the Netherlands Antilles, cooperation on language issues between the ABC islands has become almost impossible, with the activities of the Standardization Committee (1983–1990) a sad victim of this situation (Dijkhoff 1983a; b). Despite this, a considerable amount of standardisation has been done, and guidelines have been drawn up for vocabulary expansion in various technical areas (e.g., Dijkhoff 1990a; b). Curaçao and Aruba continue to operate with their own organisations for the promotion of Pp. A major milestone was the establishment of a Faculty of Arts at the University of the Netherlands Antilles in Curaçao in 2002. In 2005, the first group of students will receive their Master's in Education and Papiamentes.

There is, at present, a situation in which Pp competes with Dutch in the written media and where radio and TV broadcasts use Pp almost exclusively (Pereira 1994; Rutgers 1994), in which government business is conducted in Pp and government forms include Pp instructions, in which Pp serves as the language of instruction in several primary schools and even (unofficially) in secondary-level education, and private foundations such as the Pierre Lauffer Foundation in Curaçao have become prestigious promoters of the cultural heritage of which Pp is the vehicle. In short, Pp functions as the national language of the ABC islands. Standard orthographies and dictionaries have been produced and many aspects of Pp grammar are well described. Although there is still a serious shortage of instructional material in Pp and of supporting material such as children's fiction, there is a steadily growing body of authentic work in Pp as well as translations on a variety of topics (cf. Broek 1990; 1998; Eckkrammer 1996). Moreover, legal preparations have been made to officialise Pp alongside English and Dutch as national languages of the

Netherlands Antilles. Despite all this, the negotiation of its role in society continues.

2.4. Language and education in the SSS islands

In describing the sociolinguistic situation in Sint Maarten, the larger and more prosperous of the SSS-group, Richardson (1983) pronounces Dutch a dead language in that island, with English the language in which even the administration of the island is conducted, although official and legal documents are still produced in Dutch. English is the language also of the local media and of a modest body of literary production (Rutgers 1994). The 2001 census shows that Dutch-speakers are a small minority (4.2%), compared to for example, Spanish-speaking households (14.8%).

In contrast with the situation in the ABC islands, Dutch colonial regulations in the early 20th century recommended that schools in the SSS islands validate English as the child's home language, while still endeavouring to teach Dutch. The current situation is that both English-language schools and Dutch-language schools exist in Sint Maarten, that Saba has English-language schools only, whereas Sint Eustatius has a bilingual system. The small size of the territories makes it difficult to support a full educational trajectory, but English-language secondary-level education is now also offered in Sint Maarten; students wishing to round off their secondary education are no longer obliged to go to Curaçao or Aruba for this purpose (Rutgers 1997).

The unrecognised differences between standard varieties of English and English-lexifier Creole languages are thought to be the cause of high failure rates in the educational systems of officially English-speaking Caribbean territories (cf. Devonish, this volume). As the English-lexifier Creole of the windward islands similarly goes unrecognised, it is possible that there too, English-language education will ultimately not be much more successful than Dutch education has been.

3. The sociolinguistic situation in Suriname

3.1. The languages of Suriname

Much of the linguistic complexity of Suriname is a direct result of the ethnic complex-

ity of its population. All Suriname's languages except the official language, Dutch, can be safely called 'ethnic languages'. They can be divided into the endangered languages of the indigenous Amerindian groups, the various Atlantic Creoles which developed their current form in Suriname, and language varieties introduced to Suriname by indentured labourers and free immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, etc., some of which developed features unique to Suriname.

Beginning in the 1970s, ethnic and linguistic diversity came to be viewed as potential barriers to the development of a unified nation-state, and during the last census in 1980, ethnic data were not systematically collected. Moreover, no single definition of ethnicity is used by all relevant agencies in Suriname. All current ethnicity data regarding Suriname are, therefore, inherently unreliable.

The majority of the roughly 420,000 Surinamese live in the coastal areas, particularly in the capital, Paramaribo, where Afro-Surinamese dominate, and the peri-urban areas, where the dominant ethnic groups are Hindustani and Javanese. Indigenous and Maroon tribal peoples, less than 10% of the population, live in the coastal districts and in the tropical rainforests that cover most of the country.

3.1.1. Indigenous languages

Carlin (forthc.) thinks it unlikely that the eight remaining indigenous languages of Suriname will survive the twenty-first century. Although their ethnic numbers have increased slightly, and language is considered an important expression of their ethnic identity, economic necessity prevails, causing the numbers of speakers of these languages to be dwindling. Heavily dependent on urban society for provisions, health care and education, increasing numbers of the Lokono and Kariña, who live scattered in the coastal and lowland savanna areas and the urban areas, speak Sranantongo and/or Dutch. Today, fewer than half of appr. 2–2,500 ethnic Kariña are first language speakers of Kariña, a Cariban language. The number of fully competent Lokono (Arawakan) speakers is estimated at 700 mainly older speakers of an ethnic Lokono group of appr. 2,000 (Grimes 1996–99).

The other indigenous peoples of Suriname, although far removed from Suriname's urban centers and in free contact

with related indigenous peoples across the national borders, are also not safe from the forces which threaten their cultures and Cariban languages. Only an estimated 7 of an ethnic group of 50 speak Akuriyo, 10 of 50 speak Sikiyana, 10 of 50–80 speak Tunayana, 6 of 60 speak Mawayana (probably mixed Cariban/Arawakan) (Carlin 1998). Trio (800–1,200 speakers) and Wayana (450 speakers) (both Cariban), despite the larger numbers of speakers, are similarly under threat. Ceremonial dialogue registers, which are known to have existed in several of the indigenous languages, have already been abandoned. Final extinction is thus foreshadowed by register impoverishment.

3.1.2. Creole languages

Assuming that most of the coastal Afro-Surinamese population are native speakers of Sranantongo, there may be as many as 120,000 first language speakers of this Creole. It is most widespread, however, as the inter-ethnic medium of Suriname, in a *lingua franca* form which ranges from a stylistically simplified variety to a pidginized form. An archaic variety which originated in 19th century translations of Bible texts is still used in some of the churches (Voorhoeve 1971; Eersel 1997). Sranantongo is an English-lexifier Creole with a substantial Dutch overlay (Koefoed/Tarenskeen 1996).

Ndyuka is an English-lexifier Maroon Creole with a total of about 30,000 speakers in eastern Suriname, including closely-related varieties spoken by the Paramaccan, Aluku (located mostly on the French side of the Lawa River) and Kwinti tribes. Saramaccan is a mixed English/Portuguese-lexifier Maroon Creole, spoken by about 23,000 members of the Saramaccan Maroons in north/central Suriname. Another 2,000 Matawai speak a closely related variety. Although speakers of the various Maroon Creole languages are not isolated from one another, the existence of cohesive communities has ensured that dialectal variation is maintained. A vibrant cultural tradition, including a rich tradition of oral history (Price 1983), supports the existence of various registers in all Maroon languages. However, young Maroon people are forced to seek employment outside of their communities, a development which puts all this at risk. Additionally, as a result of the Insurrections which raged from 1986 to 1992, an unknown,

but substantial number have resettled in Paramaribo, where they are stigmatised and marginalised.

Work on the historical demographics of Suriname by Arends (1995) has established Kikongo, Gbe, and Twi as the predominant linguistic influences among the African slave population which created the Creole languages of Suriname. Reduced forms of these languages have survived as ritual languages among the Maroon populations, as well as in substantial lexical contributions to their Creole languages.

A pidgin which presumably emerged in trading contacts between speakers of indigenous languages (Kariña, Trio, Wayana) and Ndyuka is described in De Goeje (1908), and Huttar/Velantie (1997). Recently, its use was observed in (non-trading) contacts between elderly Trio and Ndyuka (Carlin p.c. 2000). It is now on the verge of extinction.

3.1.3. The languages of Asian immigrants

The languages spoken by the descendants of Asian indentured labourers in the urban and traditional agricultural areas, have survived in Suriname as vehicles of ethnic and cultural identity, considerably assisted by the fact that Dutch colonial authority in the post-emancipation period pursued a policy of ethnic segregation. Speakers of these languages are generally second language speakers of (the *lingua franca* variety of) Sranantongo. Depending on their level of assimilation into urban society, many will also speak Dutch.

Sarnami, which appropriately means 'Surinamese language', is the largest language, with about 150,000 speakers. Damsteegt (2002) characterises it as a *koiné*, developed and spoken by (descendants of) indentured labourers from the Bhojpur area in northeastern India who first arrived in Suriname in 1873. Hindi continues to be important within the East-Indian group as the language of religion and of Hindu learning (Damsteegt 1990). Although it is accorded higher status than Sarnami, most East-Indian Surinamese attain but limited proficiency in Hindi.

Surinamese Javanese is spoken by descendants of Javanese indentured labourers, who are now roughly one-fifth of the Surinamese population (cf. Wolfowitz 1991). While the rural areas near Paramaribo which they inhabit were originally relatively isolated, ur-

banisation and rapid development of peri-urban areas have caused a trend away from Surinamese Javanese in favour of Dutch and Sranantongo.

The first, relatively small group of indentured labourers in Suriname were ethnic Hakka Chinese, mainly Kejia speakers from the eastern Pearl River delta in southern China. Their ancestral dialect remained dominant up to the late 1980s. Since then an unknown but substantial number of highly visible immigrants from various locations in the People's Republic of China has increased the population of ethnic Chinese in Suriname. Because of the resulting linguistic diversity, Putonghua, the Mandarin-based standard language of the People's Republic of China, is slowly replacing Kejia as the Chinese intra-ethnic language in Suriname (Tjon Sie Fat 2002). The present number of first language Kejia speakers is probably half the number of ethnic Chinese, estimated at about 10,000.

3.1.4. Recent immigrant languages

Recent immigrant languages include Guyanese Creole English (estimated 50,000), Brazilian Portuguese (virtually all gold-miners; estimated 40,000 – 50,000), Papiamentu and Haitian (several hundred speakers each), and a few dozen Lebanese-Syrian (colloquial) Arabic speakers (Ad de Bruin, p.c.). Guyanese Creole English and Haitian, both perceived as languages of poor migrant labourers, are not highly regarded, in contrast with the language of the Brazilian Portuguese, probably as a result of the affluence which their trade brings them.

3.1.5. Dutch

As the official language of the Republic of Suriname, Dutch is in fact an urban language. It is the language of the educational system and the civil service, of all official information, and the main literary medium of Suriname. Written Dutch in Suriname is based on the language of the Dutch colonial bureaucracy and can seem very archaic to Dutch speakers from the Netherlands. Urban Surinamese often opt to raise their children in Dutch, as Dutch offers the possibility of social mobility. The number of first language Dutch speakers is therefore probably significantly higher than is generally assumed. We conservatively estimate it around 50,000. Among bilingual speakers, Dutch and Sranantongo may occur together in

elaborate stylistic code-mixing (cf. Carlin *forthc.*; Healy 1993).

The question of a local variety of Dutch has been the subject of emotional and heated debates ever since the first literature in Surinamese vernacular Dutch appeared in the 1950s. There is as yet no consensus on the nature of 'Surinamese Dutch', nor any official recognition of its existence (cf. de Bies 1994; Donselaar 1990; de Kleine 1999). Moreover, interest in this local variety of Dutch is overshadowed by nationalist ideas, which have Dutch stigmatised as the language of the ex-coloniser. Suriname has yet to become a member of the *Nederlandse Taalunie* (the Dutch Language Association), which has official advisory capacity on Dutch language matters in the Netherlands and Belgium.

3.2. Language policy and education

Up to the third quarter of the 19th century, education for the non-white majority had largely been a matter of church initiative. Creole languages and indigenous languages were used in religious and formal instruction for (former) slaves and Amerindians. All this changed in 1876, when Dutch compulsory education was introduced, accompanied by the opening of public schools, enforcement of the new policy on church-operated schools, and suppression and stigmatisation of Sranantongo. Education became the main instrument of a policy aimed at Europeanisation. Dutch quickly became established as a marker of prestige and power, and seen as an avenue to success. The gap between Dutch and the home languages, and the often poor quality of teaching staff, however, made sufficient competence in Dutch hard to achieve, a situation which persists to this day. Short-lived experiments with native-language education for East-Indian children (ca. 1890–1900), and Javanese children (1933–44) were abandoned in favour of Dutch-language education (cf. Eersel 1997; Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997).

A 1949 survey showed that the majority of Surinamese children attain insufficient competence in Dutch (Hellings 1955). After a 1980 report indicated that 35% of adult Surinamese were illiterate, *Alfa 84*, a nationwide Dutch literacy campaign was launched (Kenki Skoro 1999). The campaign was a failure. There are no reliable current literacy estimates for Suriname. A 1998 IDB Study

for the period 1983–1993 indicates that while 9 out of 10 children start pre-primary school, less than 4 in 1,000 finish senior secondary school 12 years later. The study concludes that high drop-out and repeat rates are indicators of low internal efficiency of the Surinamese educational system. Though the need for the use of local languages in education is recognised (CRC Country Report 1997), the issue has not been settled. Thus it is that the educational system still treats all students as Dutch mother tongue speakers. No attempts are made to teach Dutch as a second language, though other languages are used in pre-primary education on a very small scale (Cf. Eersel 1997; Gombardhan-Rambocus 1997).

The missionary Summer Institute of Linguistics has developed primers in several of the languages of Suriname, and carried out native language literacy programs among Maroons and some of the indigenous communities, with limited success (Kenki Skoro 1999). There is a Chinese school where literary Chinese and Mandarin is taught, and opportunities to learn Hindi are offered within the East-Indian community, but these must be considered foreign languages in the Surinamese context.

3.3. Languages in the media

With the exception of newsletters published by Chinese associations in modern literary Chinese, Dutch is the only language of the print media. It has a strong presence also in radio and TV broadcasts, in particular among the larger stations (cf. Morroy et al. 1994). There is, however, a proliferation of regional and ethnic radio and TV stations which make use of other languages. Hindi and Sarnami are particularly well-represented in the media, with five TV stations and five radio stations as well as regular programs on other radio and TV stations targeting the East-Indian population. Javanese language media have increased over the years and include a number of Javanese-owned radio stations as well as Javanese programmes on other stations, though there are no Javanese-owned TV stations. News and cultural items from China Central Television are aired on television daily, and recently, a private Chinese-owned company added two daily broadcasts of popular Mandarin-language TV-series and music programmes from the People's Republic of China. Several radio stations air

programmes in Sranantongo and the Maroon languages, and there are currently some regular TV broadcasts in Sranantongo. There are a number of community-based radio-stations which broadcast exclusively in the Maroon languages. Carlin (forthc.) mentions a new, community-based radio station that broadcasts in Kariña. The presence of an affluent Brazilian Portuguese community makes itself felt in the media, in the form of a locally produced weekly Portuguese-language TV program and daily Brazilian TV broadcasts through a local station.

3.4. The national language problem and instruments of language policy

Despite the official status of Dutch and its dominant position in education, many Surinamese can get by without it in daily life. Sranantongo on the other hand, is an essential tool in daily social and economic life for the majority of Surinamese in coastal Suriname. Growing Surinamese nationalism in the 1950s resulted in its use in the media and in literary production, and the launch of an organisation for its promotion. However, a lobby to have Sranantongo recognised as the national language failed; racial and ethnic relations in Surinamese society were seen as too delicate to have one ethnic language appear to dominate any other. Its association with ethnicity, which developed after the introduction of Asian indentured labourers, when Sranantongo came to be viewed as the ethnic language of the coastal and urban Afro-Surinamese, has thus stood in the way of its becoming a national language. In the mean time, the role of Sranantongo in public life continues to grow, despite its low social status. As 'the language of the common people', it is the language *par excellence* of any political rally.

Despite rich oral literary traditions, and a written tradition in particular in the form of religious material but more recently also in literary production, the Creole languages of Suriname are treated exclusively as vernaculars, a situation which has not helped to raise their status. Standardisation of Sranantongo has not proceeded very far. The spelling proposed by the Sranantongo spelling committee in 1961 became official by a 1986 Resolution, but for failure to promote it systematically, it has not found general acceptance. The Asian communities can draw on non-local literary traditions, which

confer prestige, but also stand in the way of standardisation of and the promotion of literacy in the local varieties, which may differ considerably from the literary languages.

Although dominance of Dutch is now no longer promoted, there is still no official language policy. There is unofficial consensus that the ethnic languages must be used if information such as concerns public health, government and political information, is to be broadly disseminated, especially beyond the upper (Dutch-speaking) strata of society. Sranantongo is considered a minimal requirement for serious public information and grass-roots advocacy. The other major languages are rather haphazardly and inconsistently used for this purpose, usually reflecting anxieties with regard to the multi-ethnic society. The concept of 'minority languages' and related concepts of protection and education are not well developed in Suriname. It is not surprising, therefore, that the threatened languages of the indigenous peoples of Suriname are usually not considered, but recently, a decision was taken to prepare Trio and Wayana translations of public health information.

Predictions about the linguistic future of Suriname are inherently shaky due to the lack of reliable data and a dearth of sociolinguistic studies. It is likely that processes of assimilation and integration in multi-ethnic Surinamese society as well as regional integration and globalisation will reduce linguistic diversity. On the other hand, the position of the major languages of Suriname is not seriously challenged, and with linguistic variety helping to mask potentially serious religious and racial divisions, it needs to be cherished as an essential attribute of Surinamese society. Undoubtedly, the majority of the Surinamese population does not favour introduction of Sranantongo or any individual language spoken in Suriname as the official language of the Republic of Suriname (Buma 1994; Carew 1982; Deprez/de Bies 1985; Eersel 1971). Every now and again, ideas are floated to introduce English or Spanish as the official language, so as to promote integration of Suriname in the Caribbean or the Latin American region. Daunting financial and logistic consequences make serious pursuit of these options unrealistic, however. For now, Dutch is safely ensconced as the official language.

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